horti CULTURE

for the home gardener

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AZALEAS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

TYPES

Azaleas are one of the loveliest and most versatile plants available to the home gardener in Southern California. Their main blooming season is mostly during the winter and spring months when many home landscapes lack color. When not in flower, the plants are attractive as well as easy to maintain. The colorful Azalea flowers come in many shades of red, pink, lavender, orange, and white and variegated colors. There are Azalea varieties that have the ability to grow in full sun away from reflected heat and other varieties that are suitable for shade. Most of the Azaleas found in local nurseries are of the evergreen type and are classified in the broad categories of sun or shade azaleas. If you happen to live in the hot, inland valleys, sun azaleas need some shade and protection from the hot afternoon sun. Shade azaleas need shade in all areas except the very coolest coastal areas in Southern California. When you purchase your azalea plants, a qualified nurseryman should be able to tell you if they are sun azaleas or shade azaleas.

SOIL

Azaleas require a loose, well aerated, acid type soil. They require moisture at all times, but their roots will not tolerate constantly saturated soils. To provide the acid soil conditions azaleas need in the arid and often times alkaline soils of Southern California, large amounts of moisture-retaining planting materials such as peat moss, leafmold, or redwood shavings should be mixed into the soil at planting time. Where heavy or highly alkaline soil exists, it should be removed and replaced with the above planting material. Many commercial azalea growers use only peat moss or a mixture of peat moss and sand to grow their azaleas. Dry peat moss does not absorb water easily, and azaleas planted in only peat moss must be watered regularly. At no time should the peat moss be allowed to dry out completely.

USES

Azaleas can be used in a variety of ways - as accent plants, as single specimens, or in mass plantings in the landscape. They do equally well if planted in the ground or in tubs and containers for use on the porch or patio. They come in a surprising number of forms and shapes. Left to grow naturally, the azalea is a bush, but nurseryman and plant fanciers train them to grow as small trees, "poodles," in hanging baskets, and even espaliered on a trellis. They are also used frequently by bonsai enthusiasts to make the dwarf trees they prize so much. By careful selection, different varieties can be planted to extend the blooming period for many months. When buying new azaleas, the site for the new plant should be selected before the azalea is purchased. Color, flower type, shape or form, and the cultural needs of the plant should be compatible with the site.

CARE

When planting, be careful to always keep the crown of the azalea above the soil level. When the crown is covered and constantly damp, the plant is suseptible to disease.

(OVER)

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Cultural requirements for azaleas are rather simple. Faded and old flowers picked off the plant will improve the appearance of your azaleas. Light pruning to shape the plant is all that is necessary. This is best done just after flowering is complete. The occasional water sprouts or suckers that grow through the bush should be removed at the base where they arise.

Plants are fertilized with an acid type fertilizer in the spring soon after the flowering period. Caution should be used and the instructions on the fertilizer package followed carefully as it is easy to burn the plant from over fertilizing. Occasionally azaleas may suffer from "iron chlorosis," or a lack of iron in the plant's system. Symptoms of this are a yellowing of the leaves with the leaf veins remaining green. Iron chelate applied in the spring to the soil around the plant will generally make the leaves turn to their rich green color once again.

Following is a list of the most common azaleas available at nurseries and garden centers in Southern California.

Name or Variety	Color	Type	Blooming Season
Alaska	White	Shade	Nov. to April
Albert & Elizabeth	White, pink edge	Shade	Oct. to May
Ambrosia	Dark red	Shade	Jan. to April
Avenir	Deep salmon pink	Shade	Oct. to May
Brilliant	Carmine red	Sun	March to May
California Snow	White	Shade	Dec. to April
California Sunset	White, pink variegated	Shade	Oct. to May
Caroline Gable	Bright pink	Shade	March to April
Chimes	Dark red	Shade	Jan. to April
Dorothy Gish	Brick red	Shade	Feb. to April
Dr. Bergman	Orange red	Shade	Feb. to March
Duc de Rohan	Salmon pink	Sun	March to May
Fielders White	White	Sun	Feb. to May
Formosa (Phoenicia, Coccinea, Vanessa)	Purple red	Sun	March to April
Fred Sanders	Salmon pink	Shade	Nov. to June
George L. Taber	Light pink	Sun	March to May
Happy Days	Light purple	Shade	Oct. to Jan.
Hino Crimson	Bright red	Sun	Feb. to April
Imperial Princess	Rich pink	Sun	Jan. to April
Iveryana	White, orchid variegated	Sun	April to May
Leuchtenfuer	Bright red	Shade	Jan. to April
L. J. Bobbink	Orchid pink	Sun	March to April
Orchidflora	Orchid pink	Shade	Jan. to April
Paul Schame	Salmon pink	Shade	Oct. to April
Prince of Wales	Rose red	Sun	Feb. to April
Redwing	Bright red	Shade	Feb. to April
Rose Glow	Rose red	Shade	Jan. to April
Southern Charm	Watermelon pink	Sun	Feb. to April
Sweetheart Supreme	Blush pink	Shade	Feb. to March

Additional information can be obtained at:
Los Angeles State and County Arboretum - 681-8411,
Descanso Gardens - 790-5571,
South Coast Botanic Garden - 772-5813.